

Our Mission

The Department of Correction shall strive to be a global leader in progressive correctional practices and partnered re-entry initiatives to support responsive evidence-based practices aligned to law-abiding and accountable behaviors. Safety and security shall be a priority component of this responsibility as it pertains to staff, victims, citizens, and offenders.

From the Commissioner



I am writing this message with a heavy heart as I think about the cherished members of our correctional family who have recently lost their lives.

Like the saying goes, when it rains it pours. Although I begrudgingly accept that death is an eventuality that we will all someday face, there have simply been too many lives lost, in too short a period of time.

Although I wish there was more I could do or say, I offer my heartfelt condolences to the families and friends of those who have lost a loved one.

Whether it was a life cut short due to a tragic accident, or someone who was cut down in the prime of their life as the result of a devastating disease, or the unimaginable thought of the death of a child - it is difficult accepting the thought of never seeing that person again.

One thing I can take solace in during times like these is that our correctional family will (as it always has) come to the aid of those in need. Whether it is an offer of assistance, a kind word, or even a monetary donation, our staff is at its best when one of our own needs help.

With a staff of more than 5,000 professionals, it is only natural that some of you are grieving more than others.

While we may never stop missing those we have lost, our sadness will fade in time. No matter how much pain you are in right now, it is important to remember there are healthy ways to cope with your grief. The death of a loved one can result in more than just an emotional response, it can also trigger physical reactions including: weight and appetite changes; difficulty sleeping; and even an impaired immune system leading to illness and other health problems.

If you, or someone you know, is having trouble coping with any of these unfortunate losses, do not bear the burden alone – do not suffer in silence. Keep the lines of communication open. Talk to your loved ones, your friends, your coworkers. As always if needed, I encourage you to utilize the excellent services provided by the Agency's Employee Assistance Unit (EAU).

It is my belief that the best way to honor the memory of those we have lost, is to take care of ourselves, take care of each other, and to be safe.

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through
March 4, 2024

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Special Olympics Honors for York CI

Members of the York Correctional Institution's Special Olympics Committee picked up some major hardware during the Connecticut Law Enforcement Torch Run for Special Olympics Kick-off event at the Foxwoods Resort Casino on February 22, 2024. Thanks to all their fundraising efforts, the representatives from York were presented with not one, but two awards. The facility was given one award for raising more than \$15,000. In 2023, the staff at York CI raised a total of \$16,800. The women's prison also received the Special Olympics Flame award for donating more money than any other Department of Correction facility.

As part of their fundraising activities, York's Special Olympics Committee organizes an annual golf tournament. Last year's tournament (the 3rd annual) resulted in a check for \$8,000 being presented to Jackie Turro from Special Olympics Connecticut on December 7, 2023, at the facility.

Congratulations to all the staff members of York CI for their continued support of Special Olympics Connecticut.



L-R: Retired Correction Officer Craig Olsen, Special Olympics' Jackie Turro, Correction Officer John Robert, Warden Trina Sexton, Correctional Counselor Meghan Niedzwicki, Deputy Wardens Mike Beaton & Katherine Iozzia, Correction Officer Eric Arbour, and Administrative Assistant Neena Lucarelli.

Costumed Plungers



L-R: Correctional Lieutenant Casey Ramos, Correction Officers Pedro Rodriguez, Jermaine Pienkowski, Dahian Rodriguez, and Nino Pettinato.

Once again, the Hartford Correctional Center was well represented in this year's Penguin Plunge challenge to benefit Special Olympics Connecticut. The team made up of Correctional Lieutenant Casey Ramos, along with Correction Officers, Nino Pettinato, Jermaine Pienkowski, Dahian Rodriguez, and Pedro Rodriguez plunged into the cold waters of Crystal Lake, adjacent to the Polish Falcons Nest in Middletown on February 24, 2024. This year, not only were they "freezin for a reason," but they did it in style as well, dressed as their favorite characters from the video game Mortal Kombat.

Funds raised during the Penguin Plunge events go to support over

13,000 athletes who participate in Special Olympics Connecticut's year-round training and competition in 27 sports. The Middletown event raised more than \$50,000 alone.

Code Red Drill at Osborn CI

As part of the facility’s ongoing staff training, a Code Red drill led by Lieutenant Rebecca Suarez was conducted at the Osborn Correctional Institution on October 24, 2023. The Somers Fire Department, Somers Emergency Medical Services (EMS), and Life Star all participated in the drill in order to add a realistic element to the training. The training also allowed for participating staff members the opportunity to work with local first responders. The scenario was an “active” fire (complete with smoke) in the industries laundry area of the facility. Another part of the scenario involved medical staff members setting up a triage area for injured staff members and inmates. Once stabilized a “critically injured” staff member was transported to Life Star to be flown to a nearby hospital.



The training was well received, with many looking forward to future trainings to challenge themselves and sharpen their response skills. Kudos to Lieutenant Suarez on an excellent job coordinating and executing the drill.

Leaders In Their Field

Congratulations to the Board of Pardons and Paroles (BOPP) Interstate Compact Parole Unit for being among the nation’s leaders as quantified by overall compliance metrics. The Interstate Compact for Adult Offender Supervision is a formal agreement between member states, which oversees and tracks the interstate movement of certain adult offenders. Currently, all 50 states, Washington D.C., Puerto Rico and the U.S. Virgin Islands are members of this compact. The Interstate Compact Parole Unit regularly submits reports to the Interstate Commission for Adult Offender Supervision, which is a quasi-governmental administrative body with broad regulatory authority and rulemaking powers. The Commission ensures states comply with the rules of the Compact as these rules have the force and effect of federal law. From September 2022 to September 2023, the Interstate Compact Parole Unit exceed the national average in every metric – a true and quantifiable testament to the hard work of the unit’s staff members.



BOPP’s Interstate Compact Parole Unit (L-R): Parole Officer Jessica McCarty, Office Assistant Joelle Cook and Parole Officer Jaryd Boisvert.

	CT Interstate Compact Unit %	National Average %
Case Closure Notices:	99.28	96.28
Case Closure Replies:	99.16	91.69
Progress Reports:	99.77	91.98
Request for Reporting Instructions Replies:	99.31	97.91
Transfer Replies:	99.83	94.97
Violation Responses:	100	88.79

New Haven CC Fish Fry Fundraiser

The staff of the New Haven Correctional Center recently served up good food for a good cause. They held a fish and chip fundraiser on January 5, to help send students from New Haven's Hillhouse and High School in the Community (HSC) High Schools on a trip to Japan. New Haven Public School District's Supervisor of World Languages Jessica Haxhi is planning on taking a total of 20 students to Japan this spring. In order for the trip to be cost-free to students, a total of \$70,000 needs to be raised.



L-R: Correction Officers Joel Pate and Steven McEntire, Administrative Assistant, Taiesha Terranova, and Secretary 2 Stephanie Whitmore.

The fish fry netted a total of \$660 to go towards the students' trip. The staff of the New Haven facility hope to hold additional Japan trip fundraisers in the future.

This trip is one of six total international trips approved for this school year for students from Sound School, Wilbur Cross, Engineering and Science University Magnet School, King Robinson, Davis Street School, Hillhouse, and HSC. Other destinations include Bonaire, Costa Rica, Quebec, Bermuda, and Puerto Rico.

While in Japan the students plan to visit the Hiroshima Peace Memorial Museum. They hope to deliver 1,000 paper cranes they created in New Haven to the Children's Peace Monument, which commemorates the thousands of child victims of the atomic bombing of Hiroshima. They will also see temples and shrines including the Buddhist temple complex located in Nara, Japan to learn about Japanese religious traditions.

The trip will no doubt result in memories that will last a lifetime, and is in part made possible by the willingness of the staff of the New Haven Correctional Center to give back to the community.

Around the Cell Block

VERMONT- The Vermont DoC is launching an internal investigations unit. The State Legislature established the program in 2021 to consist of three staff members, including two investigators. The unit will be tasked with investigating issues surrounding prison deaths, escape attempts, as well as compliance with federal laws.

OKLAHOMA - The Oklahoma Department of Corrections is looking to revive and revamp the Prison Rodeo, a tradition that went on for decades. The last Oklahoma prison rodeo was held in 2009, and it ended for a few reasons, like the quality of the arena and the need to put funding elsewhere.

CALIFORNIA - A woman who robbed a nail supply store, initially making it out with around \$600 worth of merchandise, decided to come back into the store minutes after - demanding her phone. She had apparently dropped it during the getaway.

**Total CT DOC
Supervised
Population
on
March 4, 2024
13,537**

**On March 4, 2023
the population was
13,148**



Did You Know?

“Did You Know” is an informational column aimed at increasing your knowledge of issues in our everyday lives. This article was compiled by Public Information Officer Andrius Banevicius. Any questions related to this article may be answered by contacting him at 860-692-7780. If you have any questions, or have an idea for a future column, please leave a message at 860-692-7780.

Happy Leap Year

Almost everyone is familiar with the concept of a leap year – when February has 29 days instead of the usual 28, but not everyone knows why they exist. Leap days keep our calendar in alignment with Earth’s revolutions around the Sun. It takes Earth approximately 365.242189 days, or 365 days, 5 hours, 48 minutes, and 45 seconds, to circle once around the Sun. This is called a tropical year, and it starts on the March equinox.

However, the Gregorian calendar has only 365 days in a year. If a leap day were not added almost every four years, each calendar year would begin about six hours earlier in relation to Earth’s revolution around the Sun.

As a consequence, our calendar year would slowly drift apart from the tropical year and get increasingly out of sync with the seasons. With a deviation of approximately 6 hours per year, the seasons would shift by about 24 calendar days within 100 years. If this were to continue unchecked for a few centuries, those of us in the Northern Hemisphere would be celebrating Christmas in the middle of summer.

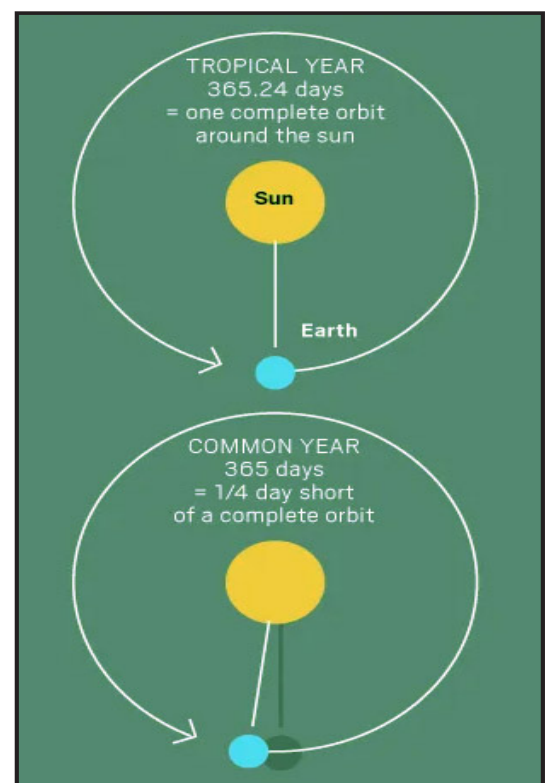
Julius Caesar is often credited for originating leap days, however, he got the idea from the Egyptians. By the third-century BC, Egyptians followed a solar calendar that spanned 365 days with a leap year every four years. Caesar did introduce the concept of leap years as part of the western more than 2000 years ago. The Julian calendar (named after Caesar) had only one rule: any year evenly divisible by four would be a leap year.

This formula produced too many leap years, causing the Julian calendar to drift apart from the tropical year at a rate of one day per 128 years. This was not corrected until the introduction of the Gregorian calendar more than 1500 years later, when a number of days were skipped to realign our calendar with the seasons.

In our modern-day [Gregorian calendar](#), three criteria must be taken into account to identify leap years: The year must be evenly divisible by four; if the year can also be evenly divided by 100, it is not a leap year; unless, the year is also evenly divisible by 400 - then it is a leap year.

Feb. 29 is the rarest birthday someone could have. Still, at least 5 million people celebrate their birthday on leap day. Your odds of being born on Feb. 29 are one-in-1,461. Many “Leaplings” (or those born on leap day) will celebrate their birthdays on Feb. 28 or March 1 during a typical 365-day year, even though documents will reflect it is on Feb. 29.

And why is it called “leap year?” Well, a common year is 52 weeks and one day long. That means that if your birthday were to occur on a Monday one year, the next year it should occur on a Tuesday. However, the addition of an extra day during a leap year means that your birthday now “leaps” over a day.



Meet the Director

In this installment Holly Quackenbush Darin the Director of the Affirmative Action Unit is profiled



Holly Quackenbush Darin

What is your background with the DoC?

I was hired in October of 2012 as a Legislative and Administrative Advisor to oversee the Affirmative Action Unit and in November of 2013, I was promoted to Equal Employment Opportunity Director.

What did you do prior to joining DoC?

Prior to joining the DoC, I worked for approximately 15 years as a labor and employment law attorney providing representation and counseling to private and public sector employers and employees. Additionally, I also served as the Probate Judge for the Town of Killingworth for five years.

Briefly explain your current duties/responsibilities?

I am responsible for overseeing the day to day activities of the Affirmative Action Unit. The primary duties of the Affirmative Action Unit are to conduct investigations of discrimination and/or harassment based upon a protected class, conducting mandatory diversity and sexual harassment trainings as well as other trainings as requested by the agency, and writing/implementing the agency's annual Affirmative Action Plan.

What do you think most people don't realize about your job/role?

The amount of time and energy that goes into writing and filing the Affirmative Action Plan which encompasses two five-inch binders. Each year beginning on September 1, the workforce of approximately 6000 employees must be balanced by tracking all activity into and/or out of all job titles and the reason for such activity (i.e. hire, promotion, transfer, termination, resignation, retirement, etc.). All hires and promotions must be reflected in a written narrative (goals analysis) documenting the overall applicant pool, the qualified applicant pool, applicants interviewed, selected candidates, and an explanation as to why any goal candidates were not selected. In addition to balancing the workforce and explaining all hires/promotions, the Affirmative Action Plan establishes new hire and promotion goals for various job categories which involves a statistical analysis comparing the existing workforce to potential candidates available to fill positions.

The agency's filing date for submission of the Affirmative Action Plan is December 30. Last year, 779 hires and promotions were documented in the Affirmative Action Plan that was approved in April by the Commission on Human Rights and Opportunities.

What is your biggest challenge as Director?

The biggest challenge for me as a Director is having the agency at all levels gain a better understanding of the role of affirmative action as it applies to the DoC and the fostering of a diverse and inclusive environment.

What is your favorite aspect of being the Director/what do you like most about your job?

The people. I have had and continue to have the privilege of meeting, working, and collaborating with employees and staff at all levels of DoC. I am inspired by the individuals who I have met, their stories, and their commitment to DoC.

What is the primary thing you would like to accomplish as Director?

The primary thing I would like to accomplish as a Director is continued collaboration with staff at all levels to ensure a respectful and inclusive workplace.

Parole Presentation

Parole Officers Jennifer Desena and Katherine Montoya recently shared their experiences with a classroom of teenaged students as part of the Watertown Police Department’s Junior Police Academy. The pair presented an overview of the department’s Parole and Community Services Unit, as well as their personal experiences as female parole officers on February 5.

The goals of the program are to give students interested in a possible career in law enforcement an overview of the duties of officers, and the function of specialized units within.

The Junior Police Academy also gives those

students who wish to obtain a better understanding of Law Enforcement a first-hand look into what officers face on a daily basis by having them participate in mock scenarios in which they play the role of the officers. Members of the department also benefit by getting to know those in their community.

Parole Officers Desena and Montoya enjoyed sharing their knowledge, and were impressed by the “great questions” the students asked. They also said that the Watertown Police officers were grateful to the Parole Officers for taking the time to inform potential future law enforcement professionals.



Parole Officers Katherine Montoya (L) and Jennifer Desena share their insights with members of the Watertown Junior Police Academy.

Celebrating Hispanic Culture at Garner CI

In honor of the culture and contributions of Hispanics in the United States, the Diversity Committee at the Garner Correctional Institution celebrated Hispanic Heritage month last October. The theme for the month was “Todos Somos, Somos Uno: We Are All, We Are One.” We are all interconnected and share a common humanity, regardless of our differences.

On October 12, the Diversity Committee members organized a potluck luncheon. Many dishes from Latin America were represented as a way to introduce new foods to those who may not be familiar with them. The event also offered a chance for staff members to learn about cultures different from their own. In addition to the delicious food, Garner’s own local DJ, Correctional Officer Luis Diaz, played Latin music to compliment the festive event.



Correction Officer/DJ Luis Diaz

Meet the Director Continued

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Who has been the biggest source of inspiration in your life?

My Dad. He instilled in me a commitment to faith, family, and community. In addition to raising children, he founded the volunteer local ambulance service, served as President of the Lion's Club in our town, and extremely active in our church. He changed his religion to Catholic when he married my Mom and attended church every Sunday. He also served in World War II in the Army as a Communications Officer.

What is something about you few people know?

My son Ricky is a miracle child. When he was 14 months old he got bacterial meningitis and was in a medically induced coma for ten days. The first night the doctors told us that they were not sure if he would make it and while he was in the coma they told us he may lose his hearing. Ricky did survive, but lost hearing on his left side. When he was 18 year old, it turns out that having meningitis and losing hearing in his left ear was actually a blessing. In his senior year of high school while playing lacrosse, he experienced an extreme headache and was throwing up. He was admitted to the hospital after discovering he had bleeding in his brain. He was subsequently diagnosed with an arteriovenous malformation (AVMs). Essentially his arteries and veins were tangled up, and would need brain surgery to remove it. The neurologist was confident that the surgery to remove Ricky's AVM would not impact his speech and language.

Ricky ultimately underwent a 12-hour surgery and is now a healthy 24 year old. In short, Ricky is a miracle. Most children die from meningitis and many people die after suffering from an AVM. Ricky not only survived both, but his only deficit is hearing loss on the left side which ultimately impacted how his brain functioned and saved him from far worse potential deficits.

What do you do to maintain a healthy work/life balance?

To be honest this is something I struggle with especially during the holidays when working on the Affirmative Action Plan. However, I make an effort to spend time outside of work with my family and friends whether eating dinner, watching television, taking walks, or just going for a drive. In order to do so, I may get up early to complete tasks and often will leave response to emails (unless urgent) until the next workday.

What one word would you use to describe yourself?

Pollyanna/Optimist - for better or worse, I always try to see the good in people and situations.

What are your plans for when you retire?

I want to travel with my husband Rick. In particular, we plan to drive cross-country, as well as visiting Italy, Germany, and Ireland where our family has roots. Additionally, I plan to write a children's book, which my family has been encouraging me for years to do.

If you could have dinner with three famous people from history, who would they be?

Ruth Bader Ginsberg, because of her fight to ensure gender equality. Robin Williams, because he is my favorite actor of all time. Ronald Reagan, because his speeches always inspired me.

What is your favorite book or movie?

I actually have three favorite books which impacted me in different ways. *To Kill a Mockingbird* was an eye opener to me growing up and inspired me to go to law school. *I'll Love You Forever* is special to me because of its message of the circle of life. It is particularly impactful to me since my Mom passed last year after suffering from dementia. *The Five People You Meet In Heaven* is one of my favorite books because it speaks to how our actions effect other people and how each of us are connected in ways we don't realize.

Anything else you would like to add?

I would be remiss if I did not mention my amazing staff. Each is truly dedicated to their jobs as Equal Employment Opportunity professionals. I appreciate each of them and their support of me as Director.